

Prejudice Affects Perception of Ethnic Minority Faces

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Prejudice can be a powerful influence, biasing the way we think about and act towards ethnic minorities. Now, a new study suggests that this bias even influences what people believe the faces of members belonging to specific ethnic minority groups look like.

Psychologist Ron Dotsch and his colleagues from the Behavioral Science Institute at Radboud University in The Netherlands, investigated how study participants view Moroccans, a highly stigmatized immigrant group in The Netherlands. The researchers assessed the participants' prejudice levels via the Implicit Association Test, which measured the strength of the volunteers' negative or positive associations with Moroccan names. Participants were repeatedly shown photographs of two blurry faces side by side and they were instructed to select the more "Moroccan-looking" face. Little did they know that both of the blurry faces they saw were actually the same face, just with different levels of blurriness and distortion. Based on the participants' choices, the researchers were able to visualize average faces reflecting what participants think typical Moroccan faces look like. Then, a separate group of participants were asked to look at these visualized faces and judge how criminal-looking they were.

The findings, reported in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, reveal that the way people view ethnic faces is related to their level of prejudice. It turns out that the visualized faces based on the choices of prejudiced people were characterized by the second group as being more criminal-looking.

The researchers note that "the present results have important implications with regard to whom people identify as members of stigmatized groups." They suggest that "prejudiced individuals may find it easier to categorize criminal-looking Moroccan faces as Moroccan than to categorize innocent-looking Moroccan faces as Moroccan." The authors conclude that this type of generalization "may function as a stereotype-maintaining device."